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Great Lakes St. Lawrence River Water Levels

**Volume 2, Number 2****February 15, 1994****With Exception of Lake Huron****Lakes Lower Than In February 1993**

With the exception of Lake Huron, the Great Lakes and Lake St. Clair began February at levels lower than they were at the same time a year earlier. Lake Huron was just three centimetres higher than it was at the beginning of February, 1993.

The levels of Lakes Superior, St. Clair, Erie and Ontario continued to decline in January, while Lake Huron's level remained stable.

Lake St. Clair's level declined quickly mid-month due to severely restricted inflows caused by heavy ice in the St. Clair River. The decline slowed as the restriction eased later in January. While Lake Erie usually goes down somewhat in the first month of the year, it declined by more than usual. Meanwhile, Lake Ontario's level fell slightly at a time when it is usually beginning its seasonal rise.

Lake Ontario began February at just 3 cm below its long-term average level for the time of year and is forecast to remain near the average range for the next six months.

Although heavy ice cover in the St. Lawrence River restricted the lake's January outflows, it did not cause serious problems with outflow regulation. Frequent winter outflow adjustments are typical for the St. Lawrence River as attempts are made to compensate for increased flow resistance.

Lake Superior, the other Great Lake that is regulated, started the month at 4 cm above its seasonal average water level. Ice in the St. Marys River normally poses no problems for regulating the outflows of this lake.

Lake Superior is expected to remain near its seasonal average levels throughout the six-month forecast period, while Lake Ontario is forecast to remain slightly below average.

At the beginning of February, Lakes Huron, St. Clair and Erie registered levels of 23, 46 and 26 cm respectively above their averages for the time of year. These lakes are likely to continue above their long-term averages for the next six months, even under extremely dry conditions.

Montreal Harbour was 1.2 metres above chart datum at the beginning of the month and is likely to remain above chart datum throughout the forecast period.

This level is lower than it was at the same time a year ago.

Changes To Water Level Bulletins Improve Information For Public

Beginning this month, the Water Level Bulletins issued by both the Canadian and United States governments will give consistent water level information. Previously, differing methods for preparing water level forecasts and comparing historical data have resulted in inconsistencies between the two bulletins.

The Canadian water level forecasts for the Great Lakes and Montréal Harbour are prepared by Environment Canada and displayed in the monthly Water Level Bulletin issued by the Canadian Hydrographic Service of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers publishes a similar bulletin, but it has used a different forecasting method and different gauges. The new format is designed to eliminate discrepancies between the two bulletins.

"People who have access to both bulletins have found these differences confusing," explained Peter Yee of Environment Canada, Canadian Chair of the International Coordinating Committee on Great Lakes Basic Hydraulic and Hydrologic Data.

"This confusion should disappear now that both agencies have agreed to co-ordinate their forecasting results so that consistent information will appear in both bulletins."

The two agencies have also agreed to adopt a common basis for comparing water levels. Rather than using levels recorded at single gauges located in their respective countries, a common network of existing Canadian and U.S. gauges for each lake will be used. The use of several gauges will better describe lake level conditions, and the data will be common to both sides of the border. This will also mean that historical water levels (1918-1992) shown in each bulletin will be the same.

Canadian forecasts of Montréal Harbour levels will remain unchanged.

The improved consistency will be particularly noticeable for Lake St. Clair. Until now, the Canadian water level bulletin has used the Belle River gauge, which was installed in 1961. Lake St. Clair's levels have been higher on average after 1961 than they were earlier this century. Consequently, the Canadian bulletin has shown a higher average level for the lake than the U.S. one, which has used data from U.S. gauges since 1900.

The networks of gauges used in preparing the bulletins are the same ones used by the International Joint Commission Boards in regulation of the outflows from Lakes Superior and Ontario.

The changes to the bulletin have been implemented under the direction of the International Coordinating Committee on Great Lakes Basic Hydraulic and Hydrologic Data, a committee of Canadian and U.S. representatives from various federal agencies. Changes were recommended by the Levels Reference Study Board in March of 1993 as a step toward improving water level information to the public.

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